

detailed regulations that are going to change the culture and the economic fabric of ranching and farming in this country more than anything we have seen before.

Anybody who has been around a farming operation or enterprise in my part of the country realizes they are inherently family operations. Young people are involved in those operations. When the Department of Labor comes out and says young people cannot operate certain types of equipment or young people cannot work with farm animals that are older than 6 months or cannot be at an elevation that is any more than 6 feet, it is a complete contradiction to the way that work gets done in rural parts of this country. But that is what we have. We have a massive amount of new regulation coming out of the Department of Labor that will forever change the way farming operations are carried out and the way work gets done on a family farm.

That is the kind of thing I am talking about. It is overreaching. It is excessive. It goes beyond the pale in terms of what we need by way of regulation in this country. We need smart regulation. There are public health and safety reasons why we need that. But this kind of overreaching and excessive regulation is making it that much more difficult for people to get jobs in this country.

The final thing I will mention in regard to an economic agenda that I think will create jobs is the issue of energy security. We need an energy policy in this country that promotes domestic production, that recognizes that we have enormous amounts of resources at home, that we should not have to continue to import a lot of our energy from outside the United States. The Keystone Pipeline, which was just recently vetoed by the administration—turned down—is an example of that. It was studied 3 years extensively by many agencies of the government. At the EPA there were serious environmental impact statements done. They all cleared, they all teed this up to be done, and just this last week the President said: No, it is not in the national interest.

I, and I think a lot of people on both sides in the Senate, would argue this is in the national interest. It is a lot better for us to get 700,000 barrels of oil a day from a friendly neighbor such as Canada as opposed to a country such as Venezuela. We can continue to buy oil from Hugo Chavez or we can get the same, the equivalent amount of oil from a friendly neighbor such as Canada, bring it into this country where it is refined and creates jobs, puts people back to work, puts capital to work in this country, and gets investment in the United States. Instead, we are going to see that energy source go in the other direction. It is going to Asia, it is going to go to China, if we are not able to get projects like this approved.

Interestingly enough, there was a pipeline just like this that was built a

few years ago, and it goes right through the eastern part of my State and other States. This pipeline would go through the western part of my State of South Dakota as well as other States, but it would bring much of that energy resource into this country, create jobs, and help create economic growth in America as opposed to sending that energy overseas and making us even more dependent upon foreign sources of energy at home. It makes absolutely no sense.

If the President of the United States is serious in his rhetoric about focusing every morning on creating jobs, one would think the first thing he would want to do is support projects that create shovel-ready jobs, in this case 20,000 shovel-ready jobs and an investment of \$7 billion, and bring energy into this country that will make us more energy independent. That is absolutely right in the wheelhouse of what we ought to be looking for in terms of getting this country's economy back on track. Yet last week the President turned thumbs down on this proposal.

I would say again, in closing, in my view, if we are going to get our country back on track, we have to get our fiscal house in order, which means we have to reduce spending, get our spending as a percentage of our entire economy back into a form of historical norm of revenues. As I said, for the past 40 years that has been 18 percent of our economy. Today we are spending 25 percent, and we are on a trajectory such that not too far from now we are spending our entire economy on the Federal Government, not to mention State and local control. We have to get policies in place that will promote long-term economic growth and reverse the decline we have seen, the massive amount of debt we racked up over the past 3 years, and the huge job losses we have seen at the same time. If we can do that, we will at least be doing the people's work in terms of trying to address the major problems I think face most Americans and the things they are most concerned about every single day.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MANCHIN). The Senator from Vermont.

VERMONT STUDENTS' ESSAYS

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, democracy; that is, government of the people, by the people and for the people, does not thrive or even survive unless we have a well-informed and well-educated public who are thinking about, discussing and debating the important issues facing our country.

In order to stimulate that goal, I have, for the last 2 years, sponsored an essay-contest asking Vermont's high school students what they think the United States should be doing to address the major problems we face as a nation. In other words, while tonight we hear the President's views about the State of the Union, the essays

these students wrote reflect Vermont students' views about the State of the Union.

I am delighted that 308 students, from 30 different schools throughout Vermont, thought about these challenges as they wrote their own State of the Union essay. And I want to thank each and every one of them for their participation in the contest and the time and effort they put into it. I also want to thank the five teachers who acted as judges for these contests. They are Brian Burgess of Hazen Union High School; Liz Lebrun of Poultney High School; Lois Little of Canaan Memorial High School; Joe Maley of South Burlington High School and Terri Vest of Twinfield Union High School.

The winner, selected by a panel of five Vermont teachers, is Jennifer Sikorski, a senior at Winooski High School. In addition to Jennifer, 18 students were named as finalists. The four runners-up were: Monica Allard, Milton High School; Kayleigh Ehler-Vock, South Burlington High School; Kate Raszka, Champlain Valley Union High School; Karolina Sowulewska, Burr and Burton Academy.

Because of the excellent quality of the essays, we also honored 14 other students with an honorable mention.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the winning essay be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

JENNIFER SIKORSKI, WINOOKSI HIGH SCHOOL
(WINNER)

[January 23, 2012]

Ever since the Declaration of Independence was signed, the United States has constantly paved the way to peace and prosperity both for itself and the rest of the world. However, as the world economy rapidly disintegrates, new issues have emerged, from unemployment to the environment to gay rights, and in the midst of it all, America stands still, seemingly oblivious to the fact that its future is crumbling in front of it. It is time to pave the way to prosperity once again through these issues in order to ensure that someday we can thrive again.

Perhaps the biggest problem we face as a nation is unemployment. As of 2011, 8.5 percent of people in the U.S.—over 26 million Americans—are jobless. While it may seem as if putting such a large amount of people to work cannot happen, there is a chance that it can be done. As unemployment has been rising, the condition of our environment has been deteriorating due to deforestation and the emissions of greenhouse gases and carbon dioxide given off by the use of fossil fuels. Renewable energy such as solar and wind power, on the other hand, has remained a topic of interest, yet it is still somehow largely unavailable to the public. However, the environment can be preserved, if not improved, by phasing out fossil fuels in favor of solar and wind energy, while millions of Americans can return to work to plant trees to restore our forests and to build, distribute, and repair solar panels, wind turbines, and other renewable energy products. We are actually lucky in a way to have to face both of these issues at once, as they can both be improved simultaneously.

America has also had a long-standing tradition of leading the way in human rights,

with such important movements such as women's suffrage and civil rights abolishing discrimination based on gender and race. There is no reason why this tradition should not continue with gay rights as well. Currently, only seven states in the entire country allow same-sex marriage, and I am proud to live in one of the few states that has begun to lead the way. I have many friends and relatives that consider themselves gay or bisexual and are actively involved in the LGBT community, and I have witnessed their struggles as they have realized that many are intolerant of their lifestyles. The entire country should follow Vermont's example and legalize same-sex marriage to continue to encourage not only the rights of certain groups of people, but the rights of everyone.

In conclusion, the challenges that we face with unemployment, the environment, and gay rights are just some of the challenges that, when dealt with appropriately, will make our country stronger and greater than before. Though our current situation looks bleak, we can always work towards goals such as these that will help make America and the world a better place.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TESTER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE BUDGET

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, in listening to some of our colleagues on the other side of the aisle—both in speeches here and in press statements they have made—I repeatedly hear them saying we have not had a budget for 1,000 days. That is just wrong. That is absolutely wrong. Sometimes I wonder if our colleagues are paying attention to what goes on here on the floor of the Senate. Have they already forgotten the Budget Control Act? Here it is. On August 2nd of last year, the Budget Control Act passed this body 74 to 26. More than half of our Republican colleagues voted for it. Didn't they know what they were voting on? The Budget Control Act contains the budget for this year and for next year. Weren't they paying attention? Don't they know what they voted on?

In many ways, the Budget Control Act is stronger than a typical budget resolution, and it is stronger in these ways: No. 1, it is more extensive than a traditional budget resolution. No. 2, it has the force of law. Unlike a budget resolution that is not signed by the President, the Budget Control Act that we passed last August, that provides the budget for this year and for next year, is a law passed by the House of Representatives, passed by the Senate, signed by the President of the United States—the Budget Control Act. It also set discretionary caps on spending for 10 years instead of the 1 year normally set in a budget resolution.

So when our colleagues come out here and say we have not had a budget in 1,000 days, wow, can they really have missed the vote, the debate, the consideration of the Budget Control Act? Did they really miss all that or—are they saying something they know to be untrue, because really those are the only choices you are left with. Either they do not know what they did or they are misrepresenting what we all did.

Not only does the Budget Control Act set discretionary caps for 10 years, it also provided enforcement mechanisms, including a 2-year “deeming” resolution, allowing budget points of order to be enforced. That is what a budget does. It sets the spending levels, it creates spending caps, and it provides enforcement mechanisms. All of that is in the Budget Control Act we passed on August 2nd of last year with a vote of 74 to 26. Not only did we pass it, but the Republican-controlled House passed it, and the President signed it. It is the law of the land. It sets the budget for this year. It sets the budget for next year. It provides enforcement mechanisms. It sets 10 years of spending caps. And it created a reconciliation-like supercommittee to address entitlement and tax reforms. That supercommittee did not come up with a result, but they were established in the Budget Control Act, and they were given the authority—just like a reconciliation provision would—to come back with a package that could not be filibustered and could not be altered and could pass with a simple majority. That is the fact.

So if we hear colleagues come out and say one more time that we have not had a budget for 1,000 days, I hope somebody will have the sense to stand up and say: Really? What was the Budget Control Act about? What was this legislation that passed not only the Senate on a vote of 74 to 26 but passed the House of Representatives, which is controlled by the other party, and was signed by the President of the United States?

Republican rhetoric aside, Congress did pass a budget—not through the normal way of a budget resolution but through an actual law. The Republican-controlled House passed it, the Democratic Senate passed it, and the President signed it.

The Budget Control Act set 10 years of spending caps, established a 2-year “deeming” resolution to enforce spending levels, and it created a reconciliation-like process to consider entitlement and tax reform.

I hope we have laid this issue to rest. So now if I hear colleagues come out and say that we have not had a budget for 1,000 days—I will know they have been put on fair notice. Maybe they missed somehow what they were voting on back in August. Maybe they gapped out. Maybe they forgot. But you know what, they voted for it. Every Member of the Senate voted on the Budget Control Act. Seventy-four to twenty-six—

add it up—that is 100. Everybody was here. And if they did not know what they were voting on, now they do. So if I hear another assertion that there has not been a budget for 1,000 days, I will know and the listeners will know that somebody is not telling the truth.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

REMEMBERING JARED FRANCOM

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, today I rise with a heavy heart to mourn the loss of Ogden police officer Jared Francom.

Earlier this month, on the evening of January 4, 2012, Agent Francom was senselessly gunned down defending his fellow officers as they attempted to serve a search warrant in Ogden, UT. Five other officers—Sean Grogan, Kasey Burrell, Michael Rounkles, Nate Hutchinson, and Jason Venderwarf—were wounded in the gun battle.

A week later, a crowd of roughly 4,000 family members, friends, and supporters, including more than 1,000 uniformed officers, gathered at a public memorial for Jared to say goodbye to one of America's fallen heroes. The sentiment from all who knew him was the same: Jared was a devoted family man, a dedicated father to his two young daughters, a fun-loving brother and son to his family.

At the funeral, which I attended, I heard Jared's brother Ben say that he “taught people to care for each other and taught others to change the world like he was doing on the streets of Ogden.” Commenting on the outpouring of support, Jared's brother Travis said: “I know my brother would be proud, because we all are his family.”

Achieving a goal he had set for himself as a young boy, Agent Francom became a member of the Ogden police force 7 years ago and was assigned to the Weber-Morgan Narcotics Strike Force.

Jared's sacrifice should be a reminder to us of the incredible risks our brave law enforcement officers all take as they protect the people they serve. I have a deep and unwavering respect for the law enforcement community, and as a former assistant U.S. attorney I have seen up close how these men and women serve with honor, integrity, and dedication. Jared Francom was no exception. He will be remembered for giving his life in service to the people and to the community he loved.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.